

## How Do Multicultural Family Mothers Perceive Child's English Education?

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The number of multicultural families has been increasing in Korea recently, and it is reported that students from multicultural family experience multiple struggles in English learning. With an awareness of mothers' role in child's education, this study aims to investigate multicultural family mothers' perception of English education and the extent of those mothers' involvement in their child's English learning. For the purpose of this investigation, the present study collected survey data from 115 multicultural family mothers with varying national backgrounds, and interviews were conducted with 10 mothers. The results of this study reveal that the multicultural family mothers were well aware of the importance of English skills and knowledge with a belief in the practical value of English as a gatekeeper to materialistic, symbolic resources. However, the mothers were not that actively involved in child's English learning for several reasons, including their limited English proficiency and economic burden. Based on the findings, the present study offers practical suggestions for assisting multicultural family children's English education and their social integration.

**Key words:** multicultural family mothers, multicultural children, English education for multicultural family children, multiculturalism

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, South Korea has been rapidly moving towards a multicultural society due to a continuous increase in international marriages, foreign workers, North Korean defectors, and foreign students. As of April of 2019, the number of foreign residents in South Korea

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reached 2,430,589, showing an increase by approximately one million from 1,445,103 in the year of 2012 (Korea Immigration Service, 2019). According to Statistics Korea (2018), the number of multicultural families has been growing from 299,241 in 2015 to 318,917 in 2017, and as such, the number of children from multicultural family attending elementary and secondary schools is increasing as well.

Many research studies report on various difficulties that multicultural family students encounter, including school maladjustment, bullying, slower language development, and lower academic achievement (Cheon & Park, 2012; Jo, Seo & Kwon, 2008; Oh, 2005; Park & Oh, 2014). In particular, it has been reported that a great proportion of multicultural family students experience hardships in learning English (Lee, 2015; Lee, 2013). Specific reasons for such hardships vary according to familial and broader contextual situations, but those students share at least one thing in common: they have to approach more than one language and culture at the same time. Multicultural family children need to learn the Korean language, their mother's language, and English simultaneously, which may negatively affect their study and school life.

In the South Korean society, English competence plays a gatekeeping role in a variety of domains as in many parts of the world (Bourdieu, 1991; Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1998). People with English skills and knowledge are in a relatively advantageous position to access and secure materialistic, social, and cultural resources, for example, university entrance, employment, wealth, and social position, through which they produce and reproduce power. On the other side of the coin, lack of English skills can result in a restricted and limited access to valued resources, and English therefore acts as a channel for discrimination and exclusion (Bourdieu, 1991). In this context, it is likely that multicultural family students who are struggling with English learning and thereby lack English competence are at a disadvantage and excluded from various benefits. This may negatively affect multicultural family students' self-efficacy, and well-being as a person. At the same time, it would then weaken national competitiveness as well.

Meanwhile, recognizing such value of English, many Korean parents attend to their children's English education and provide crucial support for it. Many previous studies found that Korean mothers are in general heavily involved in their child's English education (Ellinger & Beckham, 1997; Lee, 2018), which has a strong impact on the level of child's interest in English learning and ultimate achievement (Du, 2016; Hong, 1995; Kim & Oh, 2016; Song, 2004). In view of mothers' role in child's English learning and the position of English as a gatekeeper in Korea, it is necessary to explore how multicultural mothers perceive English education and how much they are involved in their child's English learning. Such exploration would help to understand the current state of multicultural children's English education and obstacles facing them, and to cope with the situation more appropriately. Despite a pressing need, however, there is a lack of studies of

multicultural family children's English education (Lee, 2015; Shin, 2011). In particular, research on multicultural family mothers' attitudes and interest in their child's English education is even more limited and fragmented.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate multicultural family mothers' perception of English education and their involvement in child's English education. This study raises the following research questions:

1. How do multicultural family mothers perceive English education?
2. To what extent are they involved in their child's English education?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Multicultural Family

The term, multicultural family, is used with various meanings. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2006) broadly defined multicultural family as the collective households composed of people with different cultural backgrounds, including international marriage families, migrant workers' households, and North Korean families who escaped from North Korea. With a focus on international marriage families, however, this study defines multicultural family as a family where one of the parents is a foreigner who was born and educated in a foreign environment and migrated to South Korea through international marriage.

Recently, the number of marriage immigrants has been steadily increasing in South Korea. According to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (2018), the number of people who immigrated into Korea through marriage grew from 109,211 in 2010 to 129,908 in 2017, showing an increase by about 20 percent, as presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Number of Marriage Immigrants**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
No.	125,087	141,654	144,214	147,591	149,764	144,912	159,501	160,653

Marriage immigrants' countries of origin vary though dominant countries are China, Viet Nam, Japan, and the Philippines as seen in Table 2 (Korea Immigration Service, 2019).

**TABLE 2**  
**Female Marriage Immigrants' Country of Origin**

Country	Chinese	Vietnamese	Japanese	Filipino	Thai	Cambodian	Others
No.	80,846	42,620	13,769	11,859	4,495	4,495	23,687

With a continuous increase in multicultural families, the South Korean government started to embrace and promote multiculturalism as a policy and ideology. In 2008, the Korean government enacted a policy entitled *Support for Multicultural Families Act* (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2015a). The law requires the state and municipal governments to support multicultural families for their stable settlement and enhanced life quality. The government also established Multicultural Family Support Centers (MFSC) as one-stop delivery systems for multicultural families (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2015a). As of 2016, 217 MFSCs are being operated (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2019). The aim of the MFSC is to “support for early adaption and stable settlement of multicultural family and promote sound international marriage and to enhance Korean society's receptivity to multiple cultures” (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2015b). At present, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is operating various multicultural family support programs, such as Korean language education, family education, job training, counseling service, and child-care services (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2019).

With a sharp increase in multicultural families, the number of multicultural family students attending elementary and secondary schools has also been dramatically increasing. As shown in Table 3, the number of multicultural family students was 106,583 in 2018, compared with 44,328 in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2018). By grade, elementary school students outnumber students attending either a middle school or a high school.

**TABLE 3**  
**Number of Multicultural Family Students**

Year	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Others	Total
2012	31,951	9,179	3,083	115	44,328
2013	35,829	10,305	4,358	244	50,736
2014	44,808	11,702	6,312	278	63,450
2015	54,156	12,443	7,411	350	72,064
2016	64,547	13,099	8,664	242	86,552
2017	73,453	13,987	9,398	268	97,106
2018	81,204	15,506	9,546	327	106,583

Research studies of multicultural family students report that those students tend to experience various types of struggles, such as school maladjustment, lower academic performance, and identity crisis (An & Lee, 2009; Cho, 2006; Kim, Baek, & Kwon, 2010;

Park & Oh, 2014). Reasons for the students' school maladjustment are many, including delayed Korean language acquisition (Cho, 2006; Cho, Yoon, & Jin, 2008; Kim, 2006; Kim & Woo, 2012; Ko & Lee, 2009; Lee, 2015; Lee, 2009; Oh, 2005; Park & Oh, 2014; Seong, 2012; Shin, 2011), conflicts in values and attitudes from parents with different cultural backgrounds (Cho, 2006; Kim, 2006; Kim, Baek, & Kwon, 2010), and prejudice against multicultural family students often referred to as mixed-blood (Cho, 2006; Kim, 2006). School maladjustment usually leads to lower academic performance. In An and Lee's study (2009), multicultural family students' academic achievements were found to be lower than other Korean students' mainly due to their mothers' language background and economic status. An and Lee added that differences in academic performance between the two groups of students became more noticeable starting the third grade at an elementary school. Encountering such hardships, some multicultural family students even decide to drop out of school. As of 2014, the percentage of multicultural students who dropped out of school was 1.01, which was higher than the overall dropout rate, 0.83 percent, and, as of 2012, 20.3 percent of the children in multicultural families between the ages of 15 and 24 were neither going to school nor working (Hankyoreh, 2016).

## 2.2. Multicultural Family Mothers and their Children's English Education

Compared with studies of multicultural family students' general education, research on their English education is limited in number. Two main issues examined in the few studies are those students' challenges in English learning and their mothers' perceptions or roles in the learning process.

Several research studies of multicultural family students' English education, including Kim (2011), Yoo and Park (2018), Lee (2013), Hong (2013), and Cheon and Park (2016), found that those students are generally facing more severe obstacles to English learning than other Korean students. For example, according to Cheon and Park's study (2016), which compared perceptions of English teaching and learning, contents, and methods between two groups of elementary school children (i.e., one from multicultural families and the other from regular Korean families), multicultural family children perceived English as more difficult and uninteresting than regular Korean family children. In addition, children from multicultural families felt contents in English textbooks more difficult than the counterpart group. Similarly, Hong's study (2013) reports that most of the multicultural family students attending an elementary school feel alienated in English class. Difficulties that these students experience in the class are associated with lack of background knowledge, limited use of learning strategies, lack of knowledge of the target language, and low confidence.

Attempts were made to explain reasons for those students' struggles in English learning.

The first reason is the students' lack of Korean language proficiency. It is known that multicultural family children's Korean language acquisition is slower due to multiple reasons, such as lack of language input from mothers with limited Korean language skills and lack of opportunities for interaction mediated by the Korean language (Seong, 2012; Won, 2008). Cummins (2001) highlights an important role of the first language (L1) in the second language (L2) acquisition while acknowledging L1 use as a predictor of L2 ability. Besides, the students are likely to face more difficulties in English classes where Korean is the medium language of instruction. In sum, for lack of Korean language skills, multicultural family children may not be able to understand the Korean language used as the medium of English instruction, which can result in a loss of interest in English learning. The second reason is lack of support. Many students from general Korean families tend to take supplementary English lessons in addition to regular school lessons, but given that a significant percentage of multicultural families have limited monthly income, it is hard to predict that students from the families are receiving supplementary English education through private tutoring or academic institutes (Lee, 2012). The third reason suggested is that differences in cultural backgrounds can cause difficulties in multicultural children's understanding of contents in learning materials and tests (Shin et al., 2012). Culturally laden topics may not be easily understandable to many multicultural family children who are not sufficiently accustomed to Korean culture yet. Notably, cultural topics may affect multicultural family students in urban areas less than those in rural areas since the former group of students have more opportunities to have diverse cultural experiences.

Meanwhile, several studies attempted to examine multicultural family mothers' perceptions of child's English education, which is related to the focus of the current study. Lee (2015) conducted a study involving 68 multicultural family mothers to explore their evaluations and attitudes towards their child's English education. The study reported that around 70 percent of them agreed on the importance of English education, but, nonetheless, only about 25 percent of the mothers could afford to offer supports for it. Conditions that the mothers perceived as crucial for enhancing child's English learning are children's enhanced motivation for English learning, economic affordability for offering supplementary lessons, and supports from local communities, in a descending order. Similarly, in a study by Lee (2013), when asked to list types of support necessary for child's English education, multicultural family mothers chose economic support for attending afterschool programs, systematic English education programs, assistant teachers who can help children's homework and study, and opportunities for cultural experiences in mothers' country of origin in a decreasing order. Earlier, Kim (2012) explored correlations between multicultural family mothers' characteristics and their children's English proficiency. For this, 35 children took an English proficiency test, and the results were analyzed in relation to their mothers' personal variables. His study found that mothers'

nationality, English proficiency, education level, length of residence in Korea, and monthly spending for education have a positive correlation with their children's English proficiency each, but no correlations were found between mothers' age and child's English proficiency. The study also observed that mothers' country of origin influenced their child's English proficiency, particularly pronunciation, phonemic awareness, and phonics. Worth noting is that the multicultural children's English proficiency was not significantly different from general Korean children's in case their mothers frequently expose them to English through CDs or the internet.

Although few in number, these studies contributed to the understanding of multicultural family mothers' attitudes towards their child's English learning to some extent. However, those studies focused only on the mothers' perception of English education. The present study aims to expand the scope of this research strand by investigating what the mothers actually do for their child's English education and how much they are involved in it as well as the mothers' perception. Besides, this study involved a much larger number of multicultural family mothers than the previous studies to obtain a more accurate picture of the current state. Results of the present study therefore will help English educators, multicultural family coordinators, and policy makers to develop a deeper understanding of issues of multicultural family children's English education in reference to the mothers' roles and thus prepare better support programs for the children.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Participants**

One hundred fifteen multicultural family mothers participated in this study. They are all married to Korean men and living in Seoul, South Korea. In terms of nationality, 18 are from China, 29 from Viet Nam, eight from the Philippines, 32 from Cambodia, seven from Thailand, six from Japan, and 15 from other countries. Their age ranges from 21 to 47, and most of them are in their 30s, followed by 20s and 40s. As regards education, about a half of the mothers graduated from high school, and about 30 percent of them had college diploma. Four of them graduated from graduate school and two had no education. The largest percentage of the mothers have children attending an elementary school (46.6%), followed by middle school (13.3%) and high school (11.8%). Overall, their family's monthly income is around one million to under three million won. Seven families' monthly income exceeds four million won. In terms of occupation, 59 mothers are housewives; 18 are working in factories; 15 are employees. The information of the participants is described in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
**Information on Multicultural Family Mothers**

Section	Category	N (%)	Section	Category	N (%)
Mother's age	20-29	30 (26.1)	Children's Age	0-5	35 (25.9)
	30-39	65 (56.5)		6-11	63 (46.6)
	40-49	20 (17.4)		12-14	18 (14.3)
				15-17	16 (11.8)
				18-20	3 (2.2)
Mother's Nationality	Chinese	18 (15.7)	Mother's Education	No Education	2 (1.7)
	Vietnamese	29 (25.2)		Elementary School	6 (5.2)
	Filipino	8 (7.0)		Middle School	12 (10.4)
	Cambodian	32 (27.8)		High School	57 (49.6)
	Thai	7 (6.1)		University	34 (29.6)
	Japanese	6 (5.2)		Graduate School	4 (3.5)
	Others	15 (13.0)			
Mother's Occupation	Housewife	59 (51.3)	Income	Under 1 million	15 (13.0)
	Factory Worker	18 (15.6)		1 million – 2 million	46 (40.0)
	Multicultural Teacher	9 (7.8)		2.1 million – 3 million	36 (31.3)
	Counselor	5 (4.3)		3.1 million – 4 million	11 (9.6)
	Employee	15 (13.0)		Above 4 million	7 (6.1)
	Teacher	5 (4.3)			
	Translator	2 (1.7)			
	Student	2 (1.7)			

### 3.2. Data Collection

#### 3.2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study (see Appendix A) was slightly modified from questionnaires used by Kim and Jeong (2011) and Ro (2015). It was designed in five languages (i.e., Korean, English, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Indonesian) to help the participants to better understand the questionnaire items.

The questionnaire consists of 31 questions, which are divided into three categories: basic information of multicultural family mothers and their children, multicultural family mothers' perception of English education, and multicultural family mothers' involvement



in their child's English learning. The first category contains 10 questions on mothers' demographic information, such as age, nationality, level of education, and monthly income, and their child's information, such as age and period of English learning. These questions are multiple choice questions or short answer questions. The second category is composed of 10 questions designed to examine how multicultural family mothers perceive their child's English education, such as their perceived necessity of English education and difficulties in child's English learning. The third category has 11 questions asking to what extent the mothers are involved in their child's English education and types of support they are providing.

The survey questionnaire sheets were administered online and offline from October to December 2018. Google questionnaire was used for online distribution and the answers were collected automatically. As regards offline survey, the first researcher visited Multicultural Development Center where Korean language classes were offered to multicultural family mothers every weekend and administered the questionnaire at the end of the Korean classes. The researcher made personal arrangements with multicultural mothers individually and administered the questionnaire as well. In total, 115 questionnaires were collected.

### 3.2.2. Interview

In order to obtain a deeper understanding about multicultural mothers' perception of and involvement in their child's English education, this study interviewed 10 mothers. In terms of nationality, two were Vietnamese, four Cambodians, two Filipinos, and two Chinese. The researchers initially contacted 14 mothers based on personal relationships, 10 of whom agreed to become interviewees. Korean, English, or Cambodian was used as an interview language according to the mothers' language background and preference. For those who were not proficient in any of the languages, the researchers paid special attention to helping them to understand the interview questions clearly by, for example, repeating or rephrasing the questions.

This study conducted interviews in January 2019 through face-to-face meetings or phone calls. The interview questions (see Appendix B) include: How much are you interested in your child's English learning? Do you help your child learn English? If so, how do you help him or her? If not, what are the reasons? What difficulties does your child experience in English learning? What kind of support is necessary to enhance his or her English learning? In addition, the first researcher asked other questions whenever necessary in order to gain the mothers' view more thoroughly.

Each interview lasted for about one hour. Five of the interviews were recorded and transcribed entirely, but the other five interviews were not recorded upon the interviewees' requests, and the interviewer thus wrote down their answers during the interviews.

Pseudonyms are used for these interview participants. Table 5 presents the mothers' demographic information.

**TABLE 5**  
**Information on the Interviewees**

Name	Age	Nationality	Level of Education	Number of Children	Occupation
Thuy	45	Vietnamese	High school	2	Multicultural teacher
Bien	36	Vietnamese	High school	2	Work at restaurant
Bopha	30	Cambodian	University	2	Housewife
Theary	35	Cambodian	Elementary school	2	Factory
Sophea	32	Cambodian	University	2	Housewife
Kanha	30	Cambodian	High school	2	Housewife
Jenny	45	Pilipino	University	1	English teacher
Lea	35	Pilipino	High school	2	Housewife
Chang	42	Chinese	High school	1	Employee
Lian	37	Chinese	University	1	Chinese teacher

### 3.3. Data Analysis

In order to understand multicultural family mothers' perception of and involvement in child's English education, data analysis took place in two stages. In the first stage, responses to the survey items were analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. In the next stage, the researchers read through the interview transcripts and listened to the recorded data thoroughly, and identified repetitive, salient themes relevant to the research questions. The researchers then selected quotes that are most representative of the themes.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Multicultural Family Mothers' Perception of Child's English Education

Data analysis shed light on how multicultural family mothers perceived their child's English education. Above all, this study found that many of the mothers were well aware of the importance of English learning for their child. When asked about the necessity of English, about 83 percent of the multicultural family mothers expressed their agreement that English is important ( $M=4.00$ ) as shown in Table 6.

**TABLE 6**  
**Multicultural Family Mothers' Perception of Child's English Education #1**

Item	1*	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
11. I think English is necessary for my child.	8 (7.0)	3 (2.6)	8 (7.0)	58 (50.4)	38 (33.0)	4.00	1.07
12. I think my child is satisfied with his/her English learning achievements.	6 (5.2)	15 (13.0)	64 (55.7)	24 (20.9)	6 (5.2)	3.07	0.87
13. I am satisfied with my child's English learning achievements.	4 (3.5)	12 (10.4)	60 (52.2)	32 (27.8)	7 (6.1)	3.22	0.85
14. I think my child has many difficulties in English learning.	2 (1.7)	6 (5.2)	37 (32.2)	67 (58.3)	3 (2.6)	3.54	0.72
15. I think I know about my child's English learning condition very well.	1 (0.9)	26 (22.6)	46 (40.0)	35 (30.4)	7 (6.1)	3.18	0.88

*Note.* \* 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: neither disagree nor agree; 4: agree; 5: strongly agree

These findings are in line with the interview results. Ten multicultural family mothers interviewed all said that English is important for their child. For example, Jenny, a Filipino mother, said, “*I think English is important. English is still needed even if other languages became popular these days.*” Bopha from Cambodia agreed with Jenny when saying “*I think it would be good to learn English. English is used in many countries.*”

Compared with their awareness of the importance of English learning, however, responses to the remaining questions turned out more or less neutral, as shown in Table 7. As can be inferred from the mean scores in relation to Item 12 (I think my child is satisfied with his/her English learning achievements,  $M=3.07$ ) and Item 13 (I am satisfied with my child's English learning achievements,  $M=3.22$ ), both multicultural family children and their mothers are, in general, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied about English learning achievements. Comparing the two mean scores, this study roughly infers that the mothers' satisfaction level is slightly higher than the children's level.

The mean score of the responses to Item 14 (I think my child has many difficulties in English learning,  $M=3.54$ ) does not reach 4, which is a score of agreement. However, a close look at the composition of responses reveals that a greater number of the mothers agreed on the statement: 60.9 percent of the mothers agreed, 32.2 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 6.9 percent disagreed.

Meanwhile, responses to Item 15 (I think I know about my child's English learning conditions very well) is close to neutral ( $M=3.18$ ), and only 36.5 percent of the mothers answered they knew about the learning conditions well.

**TABLE 7**  
**Multicultural Family Mothers' Perception of Child's English Education #2**

Item	Answer	N (%)
16. Why do you think English learning is necessary for your child?	Importance of English in this global age	59 (51.3)
	Korea university entrance exam	16 (13.9)
	Job opportunity	36 (31.3)
	Others	4 (3.5)
17. Which language skill is your child interested in most?	Listening	37 (32.2)
	Speaking	47 (40.9)
	Reading	19 (16.5)
	Writing	10 (8.7)
	Others	2 (1.7)
18. What do you think is most necessary for your child's English learning?	Good English teachers	19 (16.5)
	Good English learning materials	6 (5.2)
	Learner's interest	36 (31.3)
	Self-study and practice	21 (18.3)
	Parents' interest and involvement	24 (20.9)
	Support programs from the government	7 (6.1)
19. What causes the difficulties that your child is having, if any, in English learning?	Others	2 (1.7)
	Lack of basic learning skills	35 (30.4)
	Lack of Korean language	6 (5.2)
	Bad English programs and materials	7 (6.1)
	Lack of confidence	10 (8.7)
	Lack of interest in English learning	55 (47.8)
20. What causes the difficulties that your child is having, if any, in English learning?	Others	1 (0.9)
	Economic burden	35 (30.4)
	Lack of time to engage in child's English learning	20 (17.4)
	Lack of English proficiency	41 (35.7)
	Lack of information on good ways of English education	15 (13.0)
	Others	4 (3.5)

Analysis of the responses to the subsequent five multiple-choice questions further illuminated the current state of the mothers' perception of English education. When asked to choose the reasons why they think English learning is important for their child, a slightly more than half of the respondents chose importance of English in this global age (51.3%), followed by job opportunity (31.3%), and university entrance (13.9%). As regards the reason, Bien, a Vietnamese mother, highlighted a practical value of English skills based on her own experiences in the interview while saying "*English is needed everywhere...I think English is very important in finding good job. When I was finding a professional job, I was asked whether I can speak English.*" Interestingly, there were fewer mothers thinking Korea university entrance exam is the reason for English learning.

In response to Item 17 (Which language skill is your child interested in most?), 40.9

percent of the mothers chose speaking and 32.2 percent chose listening while much lower percentage of the mothers chose reading (16.5%) and writing (8.7%). In the mothers' view, their children were more interested in spoken language than written language. This result is understandable considering the fact that about two thirds of the mothers have children who attend a preschool, a kindergarten or an elementary school whose English education aims to enhance students' communicative skills by focusing on spoken language (Ministry of Education, 2015).

As regards necessary conditions for child's English learning, three things that received the highest responses were learner's interest (31.3%), parents' interest and involvement (20.9%), and self-study and practice (18.3%). Notable is that those three conditions are all relevant to either students themselves or parents. In relation to the importance of learner's interest, Jenny from the Philippines mentioned, "*As the grade goes up, my daughter has to study more difficult contents in English class. I am worried that she would be less interested in English learning.*" Other than good English teachers (16.5%), the remaining options received low response rates (good English learning materials: 5.2%; government support programs: 6.1%). This result indicates that the mothers were aware that children's intrinsic motivation, study habits, and home environments play a more important role in child's English learning than external environments or supports. Significantly, those findings are corroborated by the responses to Item 19 (What causes the difficulties that your child is having, if any, in English learning?). The largest number of the mothers (55; 47.8%) chose child's lack of interest in English learning as a main source of the difficulties, followed by lack of basic learning skills (35; 30.4%) and lack of confidence (10; 8.7%). Again, these three causes are internal to the children, and only seven mothers (6.1%) attributed their child's difficulty to bad English programs and materials, which is an external condition. Meanwhile, lack of Korean language skills was selected by only six mothers (5.2%), which is quite contradictory to findings of previous studies multicultural family students have hardships in English learning primarily because they were raised by foreign mothers with limited Korean language skills (N. Lee, 2009; S. Shin, 2011; Yoo & S. Park, 2018).

With regard to Item 20 (What is the biggest hardship you have regarding child's English education?), two difficulties that received the highest responses are lack of English proficiency (41: 35.7%) and economic burden (35: 30.4%). It can be inferred from this result that the mothers, most of whom were aware of the importance of English competence, wished to support their child's English learning, but could not afford it partly because of their limited English skills and also economic burden. As regards the hardship arising from her limited English competence, Thuy, a Vietnamese mother, commented in the interview, "*I cannot teach him because I don't know English. My child's English is much better than mine now. So, I only tell him to study hard.*" Meanwhile, 20 mothers

(17.4%) chose lack of time to engage in child's English learning, possibly because they were working outside or because they had to take care of many household duties at home, while 15 mothers (13%) chose lack of information on good ways of English education.

#### 4.2. Multicultural Family Mothers' Involvement in Child's English Education

In order to know the extent of multicultural family mothers' involvement in their child's English education, this study asked eleven questions of the mothers. Data analysis shows that, overall, multicultural family mothers seemed somewhat interested in their child's English learning and willing to provide necessary support, for example, private tutoring, if possible, but they could not afford to be actively involved in it, as illustrated in Table 8.

**TABLE 8**  
**Multicultural Family Mothers' Involvement in Child's English Education**

Item	1*	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
21. I'm interested in my child's English learning.	7 (6.1)	5 (4.3)	14 (12.2)	69 (60.0)	20 (17.4)		0.99
22. I talk with my child about his/her English learning.	5 (4.3)	14 (12.2)	34 (29.6)	57 (49.6)	5 (4.3)	3.37	0.91
23. I emphasize the importance of English language to my child.	7 (6.1)	16 (13.9)	52 (45.2)	33 (28.7)	7 (6.1)	3.14	0.95
24. I help my child learn English at home.	9 (7.8)	22 (19.1)	30 (26.1)	47 (40.9)	7 (6.1)	3.18	1.06
25. I speak English at home.	37 (32.2)	28 (24.3)	26 (22.6)	19 (16.5)	5 (4.3)	2.36	1.22
26. I do English-related studies or activities with my child.	19 (16.5)	29 (25.2)	27 (23.5)	36 (31.3)	4 (3.5)	2.80	1.16
27. I consult with my husband regarding our child's English learning.	12 (10.4)	23 (20.0)	48 (41.7)	26 (22.6)	6 (5.2)	2.92	1.03
28. I buy English educational materials, such as CD-ROMs, audio tapes, DVDs, and English books as much as possible.	4 (3.5)	7 (6.1)	34 (29.6)	63 (54.8)	7 (6.1)	3.53	0.84
29. I consult with my child's school teacher regarding my child's English learning.	21 (18.3)	40 (34.8)	21 (18.3)	25 (21.7)	8 (7.0)	2.64	1.21
30. I am willing to provide private tuition, such as English kindergarten and private English institution to my child, if I can.	6 (5.2)	5 (4.3)	12 (10.4)	69 (60.0)	23 (20.0)	3.85	0.97
31. I think I am doing my best to support my child's English learning achievement.	6 (5.2)	29 (25.2)	50 (43.5)	21 (18.3)	9 (7.8)	2.98	0.98

Note. \* 1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: neither disagree nor agree; 4: agree; 5: strongly agree

The mothers showed the most positive responses to the following three statements in a descending order: 'I am willing to provide private tuition, such as English kindergarten and private English institution to my child, if I can' ( $M=3.85$ ), 'I am interested in my child's English learning' ( $M=3.78$ ), and 'I buy English educational materials such as CD-ROMs, audio tapes, DVDs, and English books as much as possible' ( $M=3.53$ ). In response to all these three statements, more than 60 percent of the mothers expressed their agreement (Item 21: 77.4%; Item 28: 62.9%; Item 30: 80%), which is reflected in their means scores leaning towards the agreement point (i.e., 4). In particular, most of the mothers expressed their strong intention to support their child's English learning during the interviews. For example, Sophea, a Cambodian mother, said, "*Yes, of course I will. Even if my husband cannot support my son, I will support him by myself.*" Thuy from Viet Nam made a similar point while saying, "*Yes, I am thinking of sending him abroad for learning English if I can afford him one day. He will not be fluent in English if he studies only in Korea.*"

Apart from these three, another statement that more than a half of the mothers agreed on is 'I talk with my child about his/her English learning,' though its mean score is closer to neutral ( $M=3.37$ ). A possible interpretation is that multicultural mothers with an awareness of the value of English skills and interest in their child's English learning are willing to support their children's learning, if possible, and they are actually supporting it by purchasing educational materials and having a talk with their child to some extent as long as their resources allow.

However, the mean scores of the responses to Item 22 ( $M=3.37$ ), Item 23 ( $M=3.14$ ), and Item 24 ( $M=3.18$ ) show that the mothers' involvement in their child's English learning is limited though some of the mothers were doing some facilitating actions, for example, verbally highlighting the importance of English learning. Besides, they did not that actively consult with their husband regarding child's English learning (Item 27:  $M=2.92$ ) nor with teachers (Item 29:  $M=2.64$ ). In particular, in response to Item 29 (I consult with my child's school teacher regarding my child's English learning), more than a half (i.e., 53.1%) of the mothers showed disagreement, which leads to the second lowest mean score of all the response rates. A possible reason is that the multicultural mothers who generally lack Korean language proficiency and knowledge about Korean school systems may find it difficult to contact and consult teachers about their child's English learning.

As regards 'consulting with the husband,' some multicultural family mothers mentioned in the interviews that they used to talk with their husband about child's English learning, but it did not go smoothly. Chang from China said, "*I sometimes talk to my husband about our son's English learning, but he has no interest. He just told me to what I think is good for my child.*" Nonetheless, as reflected in the mean scores, the mothers showed a more positive response to opportunities to consult their husband ( $M=2.92$ ) than to consult the teacher ( $M=2.64$ ).

Also, when asked whether they speak English at home and whether they do English-

related studies or activities with child, the mothers marked mean scores at 2.36 and 2.80 respectively, which indicate their low involvement as well. Taken together, though the mothers are interested in their child's English learning, they are not that actively engaged in their child's English learning for several reasons including lack of time, lack of financial resources, and limited English proficiency. This finding is supported by the responses to Item 31 (I think I am doing my best to support my child's English learning achievement): 26.1 percent of the mothers agreed on the statement, 30.4 percent disagreed, and 43.5 percent took a neutral stance, which leads to a mean score of 2.98. The multicultural family mothers were aware that they were not actively involved in child's English learning.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study intended to examine multicultural family mothers' perception of English education and the extent of those mothers' involvement in their child's English learning. As regards mothers' perception, this study found that the multicultural family mothers were well aware of the importance of English skills and knowledge, which supports findings of some previous studies including Lee (2015). The mothers developed such an awareness mainly because English is widely used in many countries in this global age and, in this context, they believed English competence would enhance their child's job opportunities in the future. However, compared with their keen awareness of the necessity of English skills, the multicultural family mothers showed much less awareness of their child's English learning conditions.

As regards enabling conditions for better English education for their children, the mothers perceived learners' interest as the most necessary condition, and parents' interest and involvement as the second most necessary one. However, those mothers perceived 'support programs from the government' and 'good English learning materials' as relatively less necessary. Putting these results together, the multicultural family mothers had a tendency to consider factors internal or immediate to their child, such as learner's interest and motivation in learning and parents' interest and involvement, more crucial to successful English learning than external conditions, such as government supports and well-designed language materials.

Significantly, such attitudes of the mothers are in line with their perceptions of the causes of the children's difficulties in English learning. The mothers regarded 'their child's lack of interest in English learning' and 'lack of basic learning skills' as the two primary sources of the problem. Next comes 'lack of confidence,' albeit with a big gap from the two main ones above. Notably, these three are all internal aspects of the children. The mothers did not put the large blame on English programs and materials for their child's



difficulties in English learning. Meanwhile, only a few mothers perceived their child's lack of Korean language as a barrier to English learning. Findings of previous research studies as regards multicultural family students' Korean proficiency level are inconclusive. Some studies, such as Lee (2009), Shin (2011), and Yoo and Park (2018), pointed out that lack of Korean skills and knowledge is the main obstacle to multicultural students' English learning, while some other studies, including Lee (2013), showed that multicultural students' Korean language competence is similar to general Korean students' competence. It is not clear whether the children from multicultural families are truly lacking Korean language skills or not, but a couple of interpretations of the reasons for such perception are possible. The mothers in this study did not agree on their children's lack of Korean competence as a cause, possibly because, in their view, the children were proficient Korean speakers as in Lee's study (2013), or because the mothers were not well aware of the importance of L1 and L2 acquisition though their children are lacking Korean skills.

Another significant finding of this study is that although the multicultural family mothers were keenly aware of the value of English competence in their child's life and showed more or less willingness to support child's English education, such a psychological stance did not actually translate into their supporting behaviors. This may result from multiple reasons as shown in this study, including the mothers' lack of English proficiency, economic burden, lack of time, and lack of knowledge on effective English learning methods as well as child's lack of interest and motivation for English learning and English programs and materials not relevant to those children. Those constraints put a severe limit to the mothers' involvement in the learning process. The mothers therefore became lowly involved in the process in the end. Buying some English learning materials for their child turned out to be the most frequent type of support from the mothers, but, other than that, their involvement in the learning process through, for example, consulting with either the husband or the teacher, helping children study English at home, and doing English-related activities with the child is limited. This finding is in line with finding of previous studies that it is extremely difficult for multicultural family mothers, about 60 percent of whom are working outside, to take care of child's English learning (Lee, 2009; Lee, 2015)

Considering that most of those constraints are beyond the mothers' control, it is necessary to arrange various supports from a wide range of sectors including academia, NGOs, and government agencies. Based on the research findings, this study offers four specific suggestions for multicultural family students' English education. First, well-designed English programs for multicultural children should be available through multicultural centers or NGOs. In the sheltered learning environments, the children can try out English more freely and grow as a whole person better. Second, English education programs and materials should cover contents on the Korean culture, which Lee (2009) and Cho, Yoon, and Jin (2008) earlier claimed as well. This endeavor will do a service for the

children who are comparatively disadvantaged when handling English test items about Korean culture for lack of relevant cultural information. Efforts should also be made to integrate cultural information of dominant groups of multicultural family mothers' home countries, such as Viet Nam and the Philippines, into the materials. According to Park's study (2009), none of the English textbooks for Korean middle school students examined, unfortunately, covers any contents on neighboring Asian cultures. It means that multicultural family children do not have many opportunities to get an exposure to their mothers' cultures in the English curriculum. Information on mothers' culture may arouse the children's interest and motivation in learning, and help them to grow as bicultural citizens. Third, there should be English programs arranged for multicultural family mothers. At present, Korean language classes are offered to the mothers on occasion, but for those who are interested in English education, English language classes can be designed and implemented as well. As regards instructional forms, in addition to offline classes, online education programs accessible through mobile devices can be an effective, affordable option in the current digital age. Fourth, in order to address the mothers' difficulties of lack of information on effective English education methods, an online portal can be in place, where various relevant information is presented. English education for multicultural family children indeed requires collaboration at the community and national levels. Such educational endeavors will help to promote multicultural families' social integration, their well-being as Korean citizens, and, at the same time, contribute to achieving inclusive prosperity of the Korean society.

It should be noted that the present study has a couple of limitations. All the multicultural family mothers were living in a metropolitan city in Korea, which limits generalizability of the findings of this study. In addition, the current study analyzed the survey data in terms of frequency and percentage only, but further analytical steps involving factor analysis of the data will illuminate a greater number of aspects of the phenomenon in question. Nonetheless, this study contributes to expanding the knowledge on multicultural family children's English education by exploring their mothers' perception of and involvement in their child's English learning. With the help of insights into grounded realities, multiple agent groups including policy makers, English educators, and local government administrators will be able to prepare better support systems for multicultural family children's English education.

Future studies need to explore any differences in multicultural family mothers' perceptions and attitudes according to their nationalities and their children's educational stages. Qualitative studies of multicultural children's English education and identities are in need as well. This line of qualitative studies will shed more light into the complexities and uncertainties that children from multicultural family encounter in relation to English education.

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## APPENDIX A

### Questionnaire

#### ★ Basic information on multicultural family mothers and their children ★

Please check (v) or fill the blank with an appropriate response.

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years old

2. What do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where are you from?

① China ② Vietnam ③ Philippines ④ Cambodia

⑤ Thailand ⑥ Japan ⑦ Others ( )

4. What is your level of education?

① No education

② Graduated from elementary school

③ Graduated from middle school

④ Graduated from high school

⑤ Graduated from university

⑥ Graduated from graduate school or higher

5. What is your average monthly income? (Please include your husband's incomes)

① Under 1 million won

② 1 million - under 2million won

③ 2 million - under 3 million won

④ 3 million - under 4 million won

⑤ 4 million won and above

6. How much do you spend for your child's English education?

① Under 100,000 won

② 100,000 - under 200,000 won

③ 200,000 - under 300,000 won

④ 300,000 - under 400,000 won

⑤ 400,000 won and above

7. How old are your children? (please write all if you have more than one child.)

First child (\_\_\_\_ years old) Second child (\_\_\_\_ years old) Third child (\_\_\_\_ years old)

8. How often is your child exposed to English learning after school?  
 ① Almost none ② Once to twice a week ③ Three to four times a week  
 ④ Five to six times a week ⑤ Everyday
9. If your child is exposed to English learning after school, how long is the class?  
 ① 10-20minutes ② 20-30 minutes ③ 30-60 minutes ④ More than 60 minutes
10. If your child is exposed to English learning after school, what type of the class is that?  
 (you can choose more than one answer)  
 ① Home teaching by parents ② 1:1 Private tutor  
 ③ Private English institute ④ After school supplementary program  
 ⑤ TV program/online programs ⑥ Others ( )

★ Mother's perception of child's English education ★

Please check (v) or fill the blank with an appropriate response.

Agenda	1	2	3	4	5
11. I think English is necessary for my child.					
12. I think my child is satisfied with his/her English learning achievements.					
13. I am satisfied with my child's English learning achievements.					
14. I think my child has many difficulties in English learning.					
15. I think I know about my child's English learning conditions very well.					

\*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree

16. Why do you think English learning is necessary for your child?  
 ① Importance of English in this global age ② Korea university entrance exam  
 ③ Job opportunity ④ Others ( )
17. Which language skill is your child interested in most?  
 ① Listening ② Speaking ③ Reading ④ Writing ⑤ Others ( )
18. What do you think is most necessary for your child's English learning?  
 ① Good English teachers ② Good English learning materials ③ Learner's interest  
 ④ Self-study and practice ⑤ Parents' interest and involvement  
 ⑥ Support programs from the government ⑦ Others ( )
19. What causes the difficulties that your child is having, if any, in English learning?  
 ① Lack of basic learning skills ② Lack of Korean language  
 ③ Bad English programs and materials ④ Lack of confidence  
 ⑤ Lack of interest in English learning ⑥ Others ( )
20. What is the biggest hardship which you have regarding child's English education?  
 ① Economic burden ② Lack of time to engage in child's English learning  
 ③ Lack of English proficiency ④ Lack of information on good ways of English education

⑤ Others ( )

★ Mothers' involvement in their child's English learning ★

Please check ( v ) with an appropriate response.

Item	1	2	3	4	5
21. I'm interested in my child's English learning.					
22. I talk with my child about his/her English learning.					
23. I emphasize the importance of English language to my child.					
24. I help my child learn English at home.					
25. I speak English at home.					
26. I do English-related studies or activities with my child.					
27. I consult with my husband regarding our child's English learning.					
28. I buy English educational materials, such as CD-ROMs, audio tapes, DVDs, and English books as much as possible.					
29. I consult with my child's school teacher regarding my child's English learning.					
30. I am willing to provide private tuition, such as English kindergarten and private English institution to my child, if I can.					
31. I think I am doing my best to support my child's English learning achievement.					

\*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. How long have you been living in Korea?
5. How many members in your family? Who?
6. How much is your family's monthly income?
7. What language do you use with your family members?
8. Are your children receiving any English education? Where? How?
9. How much you spend for your child's English education?
10. Do you think it is necessary for your children to learn English? Why?
11. Do you think your child is studying English well?
12. Do you teach your children English or help them to do any English homework after school?
13. Do you consult with your husband about your child's English learning?



14. Do you consult with your child's English teacher about your child's English learning?
15. Do you talk with your child about his/her English learning?
16. Do you have any difficulties when teaching or helping your children in learning English?
17. If you can, would you spend more time or support your child with a better English education?

Applicable levels: Elementary, secondary

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